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Henpecked

by Candida Lloyd

Phil stood in front of the herbs and spices and tried to remember – had she said smoked or unsmoked paprika? Alice had been very specific about which one she needed, and he didn't want to get it wrong.

That morning he'd been all ready to stroll into town for a coffee and a paper when he realised his Saturday was not going to go according to plan. In fact, he wasn't even aware that he had a plan until it changed. If anything, his plan had been no plan at all.

'But they're not coming until this evening!' he protested when his wife gave him a list of things that needed doing before their guests arrived. He was to pick up some extra chairs from Dave's house, mow the lawn (why? They weren't even going outside), bring the fairy lights down from the loft and buy some last-minute ingredients. Alice would stay at home and tidy the house, 'it's not going to clean itself,' she'd said.

He didn't see why it had to be so much effort. Left to him he'd get some beers in, wait for their friends to rock up and then phone for a take-away. By 11.30 he was ready for a lie down. The spare chairs wouldn't all fit in the car which had meant two trips, and the fairy lights were broken so he'd been to the giant home store on the edge of town to buy replacements. There, he'd seen a discounted, ex-display hot tub but when he'd called Alice in great excitement she wasn't interested. 'You really think today, our wedding anniversary is the day to assemble a hot tub in the garden?' He couldn't see why not but kept that to himself.

And now he stood contemplating paprika and working through his options. He could ask a shop assistant what to do - but how would they know, he could buy both kinds, smoked and unsmoked or he could call his wife and ask her.

Later at home she held up the two boxes of paprika and looked at Dave – eyes wide.
“You’re a little scary sometimes, you know that? He said.

‘I know my darling,’ she replied, “but how else would I get you do anything?”